

# EDUCATION VOTERS OF IDAHO

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By Debbie Field and John Foster*

For too long, Idaho parents have been left on the sidelines of the political debate over education.

School administrators have their own organization. Local school boards have a statewide association. Academics have journals and studies. Policy wonks have “think tanks.” The business community has their own education-oriented group. And teachers have a powerful, multi-million dollar union.

For years, those groups have sometimes worked together but have more often argued about the right way to improve education in Idaho. Some people believe more money the answer. Others advocate for radical changes. Still others believe that the status quo is just fine.

Unfortunately, the most important voices in this process are often lost or outright ignored. There are too few groups advocating for the rights of parents with school-age children and for the smart approach demanded by taxpayers who fund our system.

That’s why we started Education Voters of Idaho (EVI). Over the last two years we have watched the debate over education reform with increasing frustration, even disdain. Like most Idahoans, we were tired of education reform getting caught up politics and being focused on personalities. We decided to do something about it, and founded EVI to push sound policies on behalf of parents and taxpayers throughout the state. Our voices and the voices of thousands of others like us need to be heard.

Unfortunately, our organization has been maligned by some and misunderstood by many due to the same politicization that is bogging down reforms and our state’s schools. We are not an arm of any other organization. We do not exist to support any one person. We were not founded to represent a specific set of political interests.

We exist because we believe Idaho needs reform. We want to put power in the hands of parents and get them involved in how schools are run. We want to make sure all Idaho students have the education they need to be prepared for a bright future. We want students and teachers to have the technology they need to make sure they can learn anytime, anywhere. And we demand that parents have the final say in how our schools are run.

Attacks against us show just how dangerous a powerful group of motivated parents will be to a politicized system in desperate need of improvement and change. Although efforts by the Secretary of State, the union and its allies have temporarily chilled our ability to fulfill our mission, we won’t back down. We will no longer allow our organization and the importance of education reform to be tied up in politics and personalities.

We will again pursue the advocacy and outreach we intended at our founding. Through education, lobbying, accountability for elected officials and public outreach, we will make the case for reform.

But we will also listen to voters. Our own polling and research shows us that Idaho voters strongly support education reform. However, the upcoming election will show us how they feel

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about the process leading up to these reforms and the personalities so visibly responsible for that process.

The voters' voice on Election Day is one we respect more than any other. They need their say and a chance to send their message. We will work with anyone – Yes or No – to make sure voters understand the measures on the ballot. But once voters have had a say, we will begin our work in earnest to promote the reform we know they support in a way that is reflective of the message they send at the ballot box.

Idaho parents and taxpayers deserve no less. After all, it is they who matter most.

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